

Renaissance art and architecture

The term Renaissance, adopted from the French equivalent of the Italian word *rinascita*, meaning literally "rebirth," describes the radical and comprehensive changes that took place in European culture during the 15th and 16th centuries, bringing about the demise of the Middle Ages and embodying for the first time the values of the modern world. The consciousness of cultural rebirth was itself a characteristic of the Renaissance. Italian scholars and critics of this period proclaimed that their age had progressed beyond the barbarism of the past and had found its inspiration, and its closest parallel, in the civilizations of ancient Greece and Rome.

THE RENAISSANCE IN ITALY

The "rebirth" of art in Italy was connected with the rediscovery of ancient philosophy, literature, and science and the evolution of empirical methods of study in these fields. Increased awareness of classical knowledge created a new resolve to learn by direct observation and study of the natural world. Consequently, secular themes became increasingly important to artists, and with the revived interest in antiquity came a new repertoire of subjects drawn from Greek and Roman history and mythology. The models provided by ancient buildings and works of art also inspired the development of new artistic techniques and the desire to re-create the forms and styles of classical art.

Central to the development of Renaissance art was the emergence of the artist as a creator, sought after and respected for his erudition and imagination. Art, too, became valued—not merely as a vehicle for religious and social didacticism, but even more as a mode of personal, aesthetic expression.

Although the evolution of Italian Renaissance art was a continuous process, it is traditionally divided into three major phases: Early, High, and Late Renaissance. The last phase has been the subject in recent years of complex interpretations that recognize many competing and contrasting trends. Some scholars date the beginning of the Italian Renaissance from the appearance of GIOTTO DI BONDONE in the early 14th century; others regard his prodigious achievements in naturalistic art as an isolated phenomenon. According to the second view, the consistent development of Renaissance style began only with the generation of artists active in Florence at the beginning of the 15th century.

The Early Renaissance

The principal members of the first generation of Renaissance artists—DONATELLO in sculpture, Filippo BRUNELLESCHI in architecture, and MASACCIO in painting—shared many important characteristics. Central to their thinking was a faith in the theoretical foundations of art and the conviction that development and progress were not only possible but essential to the life and significance of the arts. Ancient art was revered, not only as an inspiring model but also as a record of trial and error that could reveal the successes of former great artists. Intending to retrace the creative process rather than to merely imitate the final achievements of antiquity, Early Renaissance artists sought to create art forms consistent with the appearance of the natural world and with their experience of human personality and behavior. The challenge of accurate representation as it concerned mass sculptural form, or the pictorial considerations of measurable space and the effects of light and color, was addressed in the spirit of intense and methodical inquiry.

Rational inquiry was believed to be the key to success; therefore, efforts were made to discover the correct laws of proportion for architecture and for the representation of the human body and to systematize the rendering of pictorial space. Although these artists were keenly observant of natural phenomena, they also tended to extrapolate general rules from specific appearances. Similarly, they made an effort to go beyond straightforward transcription of nature, to instill the work of art with ideal, intangible qualities, endowing it with a beauty and significance greater and more permanent than that actually found in nature. These characteristics—the rendering of ideal forms rather than literal appearance and the concept of the physical world as the vehicle or imperfect embodiment of monumental spiritual beauty—were to remain fundamental to the nature and development of Italian Renaissance art.

The term Early Renaissance characterizes virtually all the art of the 15th century. Florence, the cradle of Renaissance artistic thought, remained one of the undisputed centers of innovation. About 1450 a new generation of artists that included such masters as Pollaiuolo (see POLLAIUOLO family) and Sandro BOTTICELLI came to the fore in Florence. Other Italian cities—Milan, Urbino, Ferrara, Venice, Padua, Naples—became powerful rivals in the spreading wave of change. Leon Battista ALBERTI's work in Rimini and Mantua represented the most progressive architecture of the new HUMANISM; Andrea MANTEGNA's paintings in Padua displayed a personal formulation of linear perspective, antiquarianism, and realistic technique; and Giovanni Bellini's (see BELLINI family) poetic

classicism exemplified the growing strength of the Venetian school.

By the late 15th century the novelty of the first explosive advances of Renaissance style had given way to a general acceptance of such basic notions as proportion, contraposto (twisted pose), and linear perspective; consequently many artists sought means of personal expression within this relatively well-established repertoire of style and technique. The Early Renaissance was not, as was once maintained, merely an imperfect but necessary preparation for the perfection of High Renaissance art but a period of great intrinsic merit. In retrospect, however, Early Renaissance painting seems to fall short of thoroughly convincing figural representation, and its expression of human emotion is stylized rather than real. Furthermore, the strength of individual features of a work of art is disproportionate to the whole composition.

The High Renaissance

The art of the High Renaissance, however, sought a general, unified effect of pictorial representation or architectural composition, increasing the dramatic force and physical presence of a work of art and gathering its energies and forming a controlled equilibrium. Because the essential characteristic of High Renaissance art was its unity—a balance achieved as a matter of intuition, beyond the reach of rational knowledge or technical skill—the High Renaissance style was destined to break up as soon as emphasis was shifted to favor any one element in the composition.

The High Renaissance style endured for only a brief period (c.1495–1520) and was created by a few artists of genius, among them LEONARDO DA VINCI, Donato BRAMANTE, MICHELANGELO, RAPHAEL, and TITIAN. Leonardo da Vinci's unfinished Adoration of the Magi (1481; Uffizi Gallery, Florence) is regarded as a landmark of unified pictorial composition, later realized fully in his fresco The Last Supper (1495–97; Santa Maria delle Grazie, Milan). Leonardo is considered the paragon of Renaissance thinkers, engaged as he was in experiments of all kinds and having brought to his art a spirit of restless inquiry that sought to discover the laws governing diverse natural phenomena. In a different way, Michelangelo has come to typify the artist endowed with inexplicable, solitary genius. His universal talents are exemplified by the tomb of Julius II (c.1510–15), San Pietro in Vincoli, Rome; the Medici Chapel (1519–34), Florence; the SISTINE CHAPEL ceiling (1508–12) and Last Judgment (1536–41), Rome; and the cupola of SAINT PETER's BASILICA (begun 1546)—works that represent major and inimitable accomplishments in the separate fields of sculpture, painting, and architecture. Raphael, a man of very different temperament, evoked, in paintings of Madonnas and in frescoes, not overwhelming forces but sublime harmony and lyric, graceful beauty.

The Late Renaissance

A major watershed in the development of Italian Renaissance art was the sack of Rome in 1527, which temporarily ended the city's role as a source of patronage and compelled artists to travel to other centers in Italy, France, and Spain. Even before the death of Raphael, in 1520, anticlassical tendencies had begun to manifest themselves in Roman art. Some early exponents of MANNERISM, including Jacopo Carucci PONTORMO, PARMIGIANINO, and ROSSO FIORENTINO, contributed to the development of a style that reached its most extreme expression in the work of Giorgio VASARI and Giovanni da BOLOGNA. Mannerism was an aesthetic movement that valued highly refined grace and elegance—the beautiful maniera, or style, from which Mannerism takes its name. Although the fundamental characteristics of Late Renaissance style were shared by many artists, this period, dominated by Mannerism, was marked by artistic individuality—a quality demonstrated to its fullest extent by the late works of Michelangelo. The display of individual virtuosity became an important criterion of artistic achievement, and rivalry often provoked competition based on brilliance of individual performance. The self-consciousness of Mannerist artists, and their efforts to match or surpass the great masters who had immediately preceded them, were the symptoms of a somewhat overripe development, far removed from the fresh dawn of discovery that first gave meaning to the concept of the Renaissance.

THE RENAISSANCE IN THE NORTH

The Netherlands

Debate continues as to whether the concept of the Renaissance considered valid for Italy may be properly applied to the art of northern Europe prior to the year 1500.

Fifteenth-century northern artists did not intensively cultivate classical sources, nor did they show the predilection for abstract and theoretical systems of representation that characterized Italian art. Nonetheless, the radical

transformation of northern artistic traditions that took place during the 15th and 16th centuries, although by no means parallel to Italian developments, can be appropriately described as a Renaissance.

Jan van EYCK, the supreme master of the Netherlandish school, is recognized as having been the first to exploit the full potential of the new medium of oil painting. In his masterwork, the Ghent Altarpiece (1432; Church of Saint Bavo, Ghent), and in portraits such as the wedding portrait of Giovanni Arnolfini and his wife (1534; National Gallery, London), this technique is used with the utmost refinement to render minute detail, delicate textures, and the luminous effects of light.

The enigmatic Master of Flemalle (see CAMPIN, Robert) made an equally important contribution to the vivid, miniaturizing realism of Netherlandish painting. In his two most famous works, the Dijon Nativity (c.1420; Musée des Beaux-Arts, Dijon) and the Merode Altarpiece (c.1426; The Cloisters, New York City), the Master of Flemalle, like van Eyck, combined his direct, fresh observation of nature with elaborate symbolic structures that lend a profound dimension to mundane objects within his religious scenes.

Rogier van der WEYDEN, famous for portraits and altarpieces such as the Descent from the Cross (1439-43; Prado, Madrid), worked in a more idealistic vein, instilling his compositions with unprecedented monumentality and emotional intensity. With the rising importance of new schools of painting in the cities of Brussels, Louvain, and Haarlem, which came to rival that of Bruges, painting continued to flourish in the Netherlands during the mid- and late 15th century. Van der Weyden, an intriguing and idiosyncratic genius, exercised a dominant influence on many later figures including Dirk BOUTS. Other notable artists were the short-lived painter GEERTGEN TOT SINT JANS, who specialized in tender, nocturnal scenes that demonstrate a superb feeling for light effects; Hans MEMLING, whose style is characterized by a languid, delicate air; and Gerard DAVID, whose works were more severe and monumental in quality.

The hallucinatory paintings of the Dutch Hieronymus BOSCH seem out of place in a period when artists were intent on portraying the beauty and nobility of humankind. More in keeping with the Renaissance spirit are the works of Hugo van der GOES, who was active in Ghent and Bruges. His Portinari Altarpiece (1474-76; Uffizi Gallery, Florence) is a work of crucial importance. Executed for the Florentine church of San Egidio, it introduced Italian artists to the earthy and lively realism of Netherlandish oil painting technique.

Germany

German art of the 15th century was dominated by many local, independent schools. Largely based on the Gothic INTERNATIONAL STYLE, German art received important influences from the Netherlands that intensified as the century progressed. The painter-sculptor Hans Multscher displayed a typically German blend of Gothic conventions, naturalistic observation, and a strange fascination with brutal aspects of human behavior. In Basel the painter Konrad WITZ created a severe and impressive style indebted to van Eyck; whereas the reputed pupil of Rogier van der Weyden, the painter-engraver Martin SCHONGAUER, emerged, through his graphic work, as an incredibly refined draftsman, eventually to serve as a model for Albrecht DURER.

The Renaissance in Germany is dominated by the great genius of Durer, both a painter and engraver. His astonishing and unequalled performances in woodcut and engraving permanently transformed the graphic arts and greatly enhanced their potential (see ENGRAVING). Durer's fascination with the world, his curiosity about the fundamental principles and theories that governed nature, and his desire to express its various beauties in ideal, monumental form, were features shared with Italian artists. It was in fact through his two visits to Italy, and contact there with such figures as Giovanni Bellini, that Durer was stimulated to develop his unique style.

The art of Durer's contemporary Mathias GRUNEWALD, most fully represented by the multipaneled Isenheim Altarpiece (1515; Musée d'Unterlinden, Colmar, France), is by contrast filled with high-pitched expressive power conveyed through agonized human forms, and brilliant, piercing color schemes. The visionary and irrational aspect of Grunewald's art, rooted in the medieval world, is one of many echoes of the past that were to repeat themselves many times in the subsequent development of German art. Both Durer and Grunewald had to contend personally with the spiritual and intellectual ferment caused by the Protestant Reformation, which, although of profound religious and social consequence, produced no characteristic form of artistic expression.

So personal had been Durer's involvement with southern Renaissance ideals, that no established school or tradition developed in his wake. The DANUBE SCHOOL—whose principal members, Lucas CRANACH the Elder, Albrecht ALTENDORFER, and Wolf HUBER, reflected an extraordinary awakening of interest in landscape painting—was a loose grouping of masters. Despite their fascinating diversity they shared a common sympathy for

miniaturizing anticlassical tendencies derived from late Gothic art.

Hans HOLBEIN the Younger, a painter of great talent and insight, was originally a member of the Augsburg school, a rival in importance to that in Nuremberg. He later practiced in Basel, and finally in England as court painter to Henry VIII, developing in the process a psychologically penetrating precise style of portraiture that paralleled in many ways work being done simultaneously in Italy and France.

France

In the 15th century the art of France, like that of Germany, came increasingly under the influence of the Netherlandish school. The painter Jean FOUQUET and the anonymous master responsible for the celebrated Villeneuve Pieta (c.1460; Louvre, Paris) were also aware of contemporary Italian art. By introducing elements of clarity and stability in their work, they achieved a unique combination of formal weight and factual and portraiture design.

At the beginning of the 16th century Italian styles became extremely popular in France because artists such as Leonardo da Vinci, Benvenuto CELLINI, Francesco PRIMATICCIO, Rosso Fiorentino, and Niccolo dell'Abbate (c.1512-71) were employed there by Francis I. Features of Italian Renaissance style were adopted at first by French artists in a rather superficial manner, producing effects of fascinating disquiet alongside native forms of medieval origin, in such hybrid structures as the Chateau de BLOIS (1515-20), which incorporates Italian decorative architectural elements with the medieval-style architecture.

Architecture burgeoned with the construction of the massive and luxurious Chateau de CHAMBORD and Chateau de FONTAINEBLEAU. The court workshop established at the Chateau de Fontainebleau became an important center, known as the school of Fontainebleau (see FONTAINEBLEAU, SCHOOL OF). In its exaggerated elegance and complex fantasies combining sculpture, painting, and architecture, the school of Fontainebleau represented a high point in the development of Mannerism.

By the mid-16th century a number of highly talented French masters made their appearance, among them the architect Philibert DELORME, who reasserted a classical style based on measure and proportion. The painter Francois Clouet (see CLOUET family) developed a highly polished and sensuous style of court portraiture, and during the last decades of the century Germain Pilon produced sculptures that represent the highest achievements of the French Renaissance.

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See also: FLEMISH ART AND ARCHITECTURE; FRENCH ART AND ARCHITECTURE; GERMAN ART AND ARCHITECTURE; ITALIAN ART AND ARCHITECTURE.

Hardy Holzman Pfeiffer Associates

{hahr'-dee hohlz'-muhn fy'-fur}

The New York architectural team of Hardy Holzman Pfeiffer Associates, formed in 1968, develops an architecture of collage, rich in visual elements overlaid on conservative basic structures. Typical is the decorative use of exposed and brightly painted industrial elements such as columns, decking, and ducts. These appear in such diverse structures as their Mount Healthy Elementary School in Columbus, Ind. (1972); their acoustically brilliant Orchestra Hall in Minneapolis, Minn. (1974); and Denver's centralized Boettcher Concert Hall (1978). Their massive yellow limestone Robert O. Anderson Building (1987) at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art stirred controversy. The firm has been in the forefront of the building recycling movement, as in their work at the St. Louis (Mo.) Art Museum (completed 1977) and the COOPER-HEWITT MUSEUM (completed 1976) and the Joyce Theater (completed 1982), both in New York City. Their work also includes the renovation (1987) of the Rainbow Room at Rockefeller Center in New York City. Hugh Hardy, b. Majorca, Spain, July 26, 1932, educated at Princeton University (1956), worked previously with architect Eero Saarinen and stage designer Jo Mielziner. Malcolm Holzman, b. Sept. 26, 1940, educated at Pratt Institute in New York City (1963), had worked with John Graham & Company and with Kelly & Cruzen. Norman Pfeiffer, b. Seattle, Wash. Nov. 13, 1940, educated at the University of Washington and at Columbia University (1965), previously worked with Kirk, Wallace & McKinley.

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See also: POSTMODERN ARCHITECTURE.